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Botha, Colin Graham

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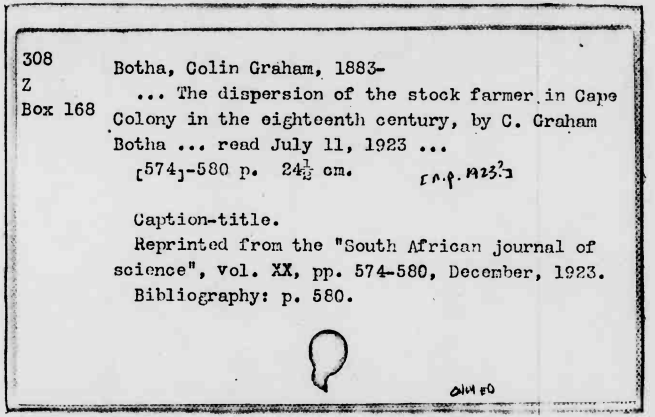

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THE DISPERSION OF THE STOCK FARMER IN CAPE COLONY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

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BY

C. GRAHAM BOTHA,

Chief Archivist, Union of South Africa.

Read July 11, 1923.

The object of the Dutch East India Company in taking possession of the Cape was merely to have a halfway house to the Indies. They wanted a place where their ships passing to and from the East could obtain fresh provisions and water for the seamen, and have their ships repaired in readiness for the second half of the voyage. The Company did not contemplate establishing a colony. Colonisation as we understand it was not part of their programme. In the early years of the settlement their representatives at the Cape endeavoured by their own activities to supply the ships with the required provisions. In 1657, when the five years' contract of some of their men had expired, they gave them land along the Liesbeek to cultivate and produce grain. These were the first farmers of the country. More men received their discharge and were desirous of becoming farmers. To their number were added settlers from Holland, and in 1688 a batch of French refugees arrived. In course of time the Company was able to supply their vessels with grain, meat and wine.

The agriculturists sold their produce to the Company, who found that their own farming labours were expensive and unsatisfactory. They decided, therefore, that the farmers should undertake this work. Thus the Dutch East India Company gave up all their agricultural pursuits and looked to the settled farmer to supply what they required for their garrison and ships. This took place towards the end of the 17th century. By the beginning of the next century the boundary of the colony had extended to the Drakenstein Mountains.

But the supply of fresh meat was also a very necessary commodity for the ships. When van Riebeeck arrived in 1652 he had to look to the natives for this, and obtained it by barter. Expeditions were sent out from time to time to open up a cattle trade with the Hottentots, to ascertain the possibilities of the

land, and to gain geographical knowledge. The reasons of these journeys were mainly economic. The burghers or freemen, so called to distinguish them from the Company's servants, were from time to time prohibited by placaat to carry on any trade with the natives. In 1700, upon instructions received from the Seventeen the previous year, the cattle barter was thrown open, but was withdrawn again some years later. In 1726 further instructions were received from Holland prohibiting all private trade with the Hottentots. The Government wanted to have the monopoly for themselves, and they restricted the farmers in order to prevent any acts being committed which might cause friction between the Europeans and natives.

The farming community had begun to spread out in the early years of the 18th century, and to cross the first mountain barriers. Some had pushed on beyond the boundary, in spite of the restrictive laws, and continued onwards. The Government was not anxious that settlers should go too far inland, but, notwithstanding the frequent placaats issued, they moved on and the authorities followed them of necessity. By the end of the first decade of the century a gradual dispersion had taken place.

The Company had never intended the Cape to be anything more than a refreshment station. When they gave up farming operations to the burghers, it had gradually become a flourishing agricultural colony by the beginning of the eighteenth century. This change was imperceptible at first, but became recognised as time went on. In 1700, farmers had occupied a rectangle between the Cape and the mountain barriers, some fifty miles each way. Here lived the more settled farmer who grew corn and made wine. There was also another class, the stock farmer, who raised sheep and cattle and, where possible, added to his stock by barter with the natives. This class formed a large portion of the inland European population. It is the movements of the stock farmer that I wish to consider in this paper. At certain times he had to seek fresh pastures and watering places for his stock, and was thus constantly on the move.

It is necessary here to give a brief account of the form of land tenure at the Cape in the eighteenth century. There were three kinds, namely, freehold, loan and quitrent. Under the first the grantee was given full ownership of the land under certain conditions, and was issued a title deed. Many of the farms in the Western Province were granted in freehold. In loan tenure, the land was issued on lease for six months or a year on payment of rent. The practice was for a farmer to select a suitable locality to graze his stock and apply to the Government for a permit to allow him to remain there. As a rule, this was never refused and was granted on condition that he did not encroach on the rights of others. The permission had

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to be renewed on its expiration. Thus, a stock farmer would go on from year to year, and even his children after him. If he found the ground unsuitable or wanted more ground, he moved further on and took out a permit for the other land chosen. It sometimes happened that he possessed several such farms. The Government had the right to withdraw the lease at its expiration, but this was seldom done; if the lease was not renewed, the occupier was paid compensation for the *opstal* or buildings he had erected thereon. The lessee had no *dominium* in the ground, which belonged to the Company, and he could only sell or bequeath the *opstal* and nothing more. In spite of this precarious tenure the farmer felt quite safe. Most of the farms in the interior were held under this form, and the farm was commonly called a *leenings plaats*, a loan place. It was such a place which the stock farmer occupied. The third kind of tenure was introduced in 1732, when loan farms could be leased for fifteen years, after which the contract had to be renewed.

Copies of the permits to occupy loan places during the eighteenth century are still extant and are preserved in the Cape Archives. From a careful examination of these we can map out approximately the directions taken by the stock farmers. In the permit the name of the farm is mentioned and, in cases where we are able to identify this with the present farm name, we can trace to some extent the movements of these men. The earlier permits describe the locality in very vague terms, giving perhaps only the physical features of the country. After the second decade of the century it seems to have become more customary to give a place a distinctive name. This helps us to identify the situation more readily. As an example of this the following might illustrate my point. In 1716 a farm is described as "over de Vier en Twintig Rivieren op de gewesene plaats van de Landbouwer Adriaan Wilders." The river name is easy enough to locate, but the farm might be two to ten miles from it and the four compass directions from that of the agriculturist Wilders. Another permit of the same year describes the farm as "aan de Slang Hoek." Those who have studied South African nomenclature know very well how many rivers, mountains, farms and other localities bear the same name, although situated in different parts of the Cape Province. This adds another difficulty to this research. A more precise description of a farm is an example in 1727, which tells us that it is situated "aan de Vleesbank op de Berg Rivier genaamt het Groot Verlang." Here we have the name and the exact locality.

The farmers' movements through Cape Colony during the eighteenth century formed one of the stages of the colonisation and expansion of South Africa. Up to the end of the first decade there was the period of settlement, followed by the period of dispersion. From the latter stage the farmers advanced step

by step over different areas, and located themselves in places where they could find suitable pasturage for their cattle. They followed the river courses and for some time kept along the seaward side of the mountains, which were steep on that side. But, when once the first pioneers had crossed over by the many passes which traversed them, others soon followed. The rivers were unsuitable as a means of transport, and in the winter time were an obstacle and a danger. They were, however, very necessary for the water supply of the stock farmer.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century farms were occupied as far as Riebeeck Kasteel and in the Tulbagh Basin. Broadly speaking there appear to have been three lines of migration, namely, one that went to the north-west, branching off to the north-east, one that crossed the Hottentots Holland Mountains and followed the coastal line and splitting up towards the north-east, and the third line pushing across the Karoo, keeping along the Nieuwveld. The last two lines worked slowly towards the border districts in the present Eastern Province, and arrived at the same line or latitude almost simultaneously.

Before 1730 farms had been issued in the present districts of the Cape, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Malmesbury, Piequetberg, Swellendam, Robertson, Tulbagh, Worcester, Riversdale, Bredasdorp, Mossel Bay and George. As far as the present town of Clanwilliam and in the lower waters of the Olifants River, " loan " farms had been given out. A few places were held on the eastern side of the Witzenberg and the Cold Bokkeveld Mountains. A similar advance to the south-eastern part of the Colony had been made. One of the first farms occupied beyond the mountain barrier was that situated at Zwartberg, now Caledon. It was granted as a freehold place to one Ferdinandus Appel, because he was prepared to erect a suitable place of accommodation for visitors to the hot springs. The well-known and much used Caledon Baths has been a place sought after by invalids from far and near for more than two centuries.

The movement after 1730 and before 1750 to the north-west was over the mountain range running parallel to the west coast. The farmers chose places in the Bokkeveld and occupied the present districts of Ceres and Calvinia. One group pushed due north through the present Van Rhynsdorp district and went into Namaqualand. In 1750 a farm was taken at Leliefontein, now a mission station. The Roggeveld was occupied during the forties and gradually the present districts of Sutherland and Fraserburg were populated. In the sixties the Zak River was the objective. While the Bokkeveld and the Roggeveld were slowly being filled up, the movement after 1730 beyond the present district of George was not so pronounced. Few farms were taken out there until about 1754, when the advance was resumed. As early as 1744 a " loan " farm had been registered at the Cabeljauws River, and in 1754 one at Assegai Bosch. Both these are in the Humansdorp district. But these were outstanding cases and cannot be taken to indicate that the general stream had moved as far.

The fact must not be overlooked that there were a number of places occupied for which permits were not obtained. The line of progress described above has been deduced from the leases issued and from the names of the farms which can be identified. There is no doubt that there were a number of farmers who moved beyond the recognised outskirts of the colony, men who were not only anxious to go big game hunting but also to barter with the natives. Of these there is no record. This is substantiated by the report of a commission sent in 1769 to lay down a permanent boundary between the districts of Stellenbosch and Swellendam, and to inspect the most distant farms and find out the state of affairs. This commission stated that they found between the Gamtoos and the Fish Rivers a number of persons with large herds of cattle who were not paying rent, and others who were moving about with their cattle just where they pleased.

Ensign Beutler has noted in his diary of his journey to the Kei in 1752 that the last farm occupied by Europeans in the south-east was at Hagel Kraal, near Mossel Bay. In 1756 one of the advance stock farmers had crossed over the Attaquas Kloof, near the present Robinson's Pass, and settled at Klippe Drift. This marked the beginning of the line across the first barrier on the south coast and it spread eastward between here and the Zwartberg. Another branch of this kept due north and came to Kruis River " aan de Cango " in 1759. Here it went to east and west, farmers taking up places in the Langekloof. Then followed a movement over the Zwartberg, no doubt crossing over the pass of that name, and so into the present district of Prince Albert. But the Cango was also reached from the direction of Cogmans Kloof in the Robertson district, as many farms in the early fifties are referred to as being " over de Cogmans Kloof." In 1760 a " loan " farm is described as at " de Cango aan de Doorn Rivier over Cogmans Kloof." The line proceeded eastward through Prince Albert on to Willowmore. It reached the Kariega River in 1769 and passed through the Aberdeen district. Here this stream met those lines converging towards what is now Graaff-Reinet and the Eastern Province. The course which proceeded through the Langekloof and further south reached the Kromme River in the sixties, and went towards the south-western part of Uitenhage and then into what is now the district of Jansenville.

The advance across the Great Karoo would appear to have been from over the Hex River Mountains and also through Cogmans Kloof. The farmers were not so ready at first to seek places in the Karoo, which was known as the Droogeveld, the

Dry Country. This name gives some indication of the reason why they did not do so. When they did cross over the mountain barrier into this part their travel was made easy by the flatness and hardness of the ground, but the earlier pioneers kept along the base of the mountain ranges skirting the Karoo.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the line had advanced past the southern parts of the Klein Roggeveld up towards the Nieuwveld. In 1760 a farm described as "Hooyvlakte in de Carro onder Roggevelds Berg" was loaned. This was the site of the present township of Beaufort West. A few years later a farm "agter de Roggelandsberg in de Koup" was granted. This is the locality now known as the Gouph, sometimes found spelt Ghoup. From this date the area round here as well as in the Nieuwveld rapidly became occupied. The branches of this line spread out steadily until they came into contact with those from the south and south-east, and became merged in the general flow towards what is now the Eastern Province. The Camdebo (Graaff-Reinet) was one of the objectives, and farms were leased here about 1770.

About this date several farms were taken in what are now the districts of Graaff-Reinet, Aberdeen and Somerset East. At this period the name appears in the records of Bruyns Hoogte, now Bruintjes Hoogte, which, with the Gamtoos River, was declared in 1770 as the eastern colonial boundary. In 1778 a number of heads of families living near the eastern border petitioned the governor, Baron van Plettenberg, to have a church and a court of law established there. Van Plettenberg decided to visit the frontier and look into the condition of affairs himself. He set out in September, 1778, accompanied by several officials. The diary kept of this trip shows that farms were occupied at the Camdebo, Sneeuwberg, Bruintjes Hoogte, Bosch Berg (Somerset East), Great Fish River, and near the Zwartkops. In 1775 the Government declared the Upper Fish and the Bushmans Rivers to be the boundary of the colony. At the end of the eighteenth century the Fish River was still the boundary. From the early years of the century, when the farmers gradually trekked from parts fifty miles beyond Capetown, the boundary was shifted from time to time. Restrictions were placed on this trekking but were not heeded. The population moved on and the Government continued to follow.

The way for the advance of the stock farmer during the eighteenth century had to some extent been prepared by the explorers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These men had been sent out from time to time with the purpose of opening up trade with the natives, ascertaining the possibilities of the country, and adding geographical knowledge. On the whole the reasons were mainly economic. The same reasons, to some extent, also decided the direction they took. In Van

Riebeek's day the rich empire of Monomotapo was the objective. This was supposed to be more than eight hundred miles in a north-easterly direction from the Cape. But the physical features of the country also directed the course, as those who first went to the north-west and south-east kept on the coast side of the mountain ranges. As has been shown, the farmers appear to have followed the same line. They also moved on the same side of the mountains, where they could obtain pasturage and water for their cattle. Thus they dispersed to the north-west, the north-east and the south-east, and later on into the Karoo area.

REFERENCES.

"Wildschut or Ordonnantie Boek." About 18 volumes were used. Each permit was consulted, and when a place could be identified and showed an advance in the movement it was recorded.

Map of the Cape Colony, prepared by the Surveyor-General, 1895.

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